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AUTHOR Olien, Clarice N.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

To determine whether there are systematic differences in press role between nations or blocs of nations, an exploratory study examined structural differences between United States and European political systems and whether, in light of these differences, press roles may vary in some respects across continents. These editors were interviewed about the roles their newspapers play in their communities and their judgments about reporting and editorializing on a wide range of public affairs issues, including community planning. Data are based on interviews of 155 American editors of a Midwestern regional sample of 59 weeklies and 96 dailies, and 30 European editors of nonmetropolitan communities in The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and West Germany. Findings revealed that: (1) the role of the community press is highly similar in different nations of the Western world; (2) on both continents, the editors share the same relative priorities with respect to news and information, and upon reporting the issues in government, education, and business; and (3) the differences that do appear are primarily seen in less inclination among European editors to rate certain issues such as school controversies and community planning as highly appropriate for their editorial columns. Findings pointed to some differences in perceptions of the watchdog function and the information role. (Five tables of data and 37 notes are included.) (MS)

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Editor Views of Press Role in U.S. and Europe
Differences Across Cultures, or Differences Within?

Clarice N. Olien, Phillip J. Tichenor, and George A. Donohue

University of Minnesota

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EDITOR VIEWS OF PRESS ROLE IN U.S. AND EUROPE:
Differences across cultures, or differences within?

C. N. Olien, P. J. Tichenor, and G. A. Donohue

Mass media in any system perform a social control function that varies according to system constraints. Nonmetropolitan weeklies and regional city dailies have different conflict reporting functions, largely because daily publication occurs within communities which are more pluralistic in structure than those served by weeklies.[1] Corporate ownership is a factor found in some studies, although not all, to be associated with certain patterns of reporting.[2]

The question remains, however, whether there are systematic differences in press role between nations or blocs of nations. There has been some speculation about structural differences between U. S. and European political systems [3], and whether in

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1. See G. A. Donohue, P. J. Tichenor, and C. N. Olien, "Mass media functions and social control." Journalism Quarterly 50:652-659, Winter, 1973; P. J. Tichenor, G. A. Donohue and C. N. Olien, COMMUNITY CONFLICT AND THE PRESS. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980; and G. A. Donohue, C. N. Olien and P. J. Tichenor, "Reporting conflict by pluralism, newspaper type and ownership." Journalism Quarterly 62: 489-499, Autumn, 1985.

2. Picard, R. G., J. P. Winter, M. E. McCombs and S. Lacy, editors, PRESS CONCENTRATION: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP AND OPERATION. Norwood, N. J.: Ablex, 1988.

3. See Mark Kesselman and Donald Rosenthal, LOCAL POWER AND COMPARATIVE POLITICS, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1974; Kenneth E. Boulding, THE WORLD AS A TOTAL SYSTEM. Beverly Hills, Ca.: Sage, 1985; Samuel P. Huntington, "Political Modernization: America vs. Europe," pp. 170-200 in Reinhard Bendix, editor, STATE AND SOCIETY: A READER IN COMPARATIVE POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY, Boston: Little, Brown, 1968; Glenda G. Rosenthal and Donald J. Puchala,

light of these differences press roles may vary in some respects across continents.[4]

While consequences of factors influencing community press functions have been studied extensively within certain nations, comparative analyses of community media across national systems are rare. This is a report of an exploratory analysis of press role among a purposively-selected sample of 30 community newspaper editors in five European nations: the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland and West Germany. These editors were interviewed in spring, 1988 about (a) the roles their newspapers play in their communities and (b) their judgments about reporting and editorializing on a wide range of public affairs issues, including community planning. Their responses are compared with those from editors in 155 communities in U. S. Midwest states interviewed in 1985.

Cross-National Similarities in Gatekeeping

Because of the similarity of cultural heritage, community editors in European and American systems are expected to perceive similar community gatekeeping roles. These nations tend to be

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"Decisional systems, adaptiveness, and European decisionmaking," Annals, 440:54-65, 1978; and Stuart A. Scheingold, "The (European economic) community in perspective: Public policy and political structure," Annals, 440:156-167, 1978.

4. See John C. Merrill, Carter R. Bryan, and Marvin Alisky THE FOREIGN PRESS: A Survey of the World's Journalism. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1964, 1970; and John J. Karch, "News and its uses in the Communist world," Chap. 7 in John L. Martin and Anju G. Chaudhary, eds., COMPARATIVE MASS MEDIA SYSTEMS. White Plains N.Y.: 1983.

structurally alike, with highly pluralistic economies and highly centralized political control. Pluralism presumably produces a press oriented toward exchanging news and opinion among established power groups.

The comparative literature generally treats "Western Media" as one system to be contrasted with "Eastern," Soviet, or Third World media.[5] Newspapers in Europe and North America are seen as comparable in several respects. All are in industrialized, economically active nations [6] in which newspapers are operated primarily as businesses supported largely by advertising [7,8, 9].

One of the touted differences among nations is thought to be the status of governmental support of the press. While some have argued that public subsidies to newspapers are more common in Europe than in the U. S., Picard's analysis raises questions

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5. See Merrill, Bryan, and Alisky, op. cit. and Martin and Anju G. Chaudhary, op. cit.

6. See Martin and Chaudhary, op. cit., and Christine Ogan, "Coverage of development news in developed and developing countries," Journalism Quarterly 64:80-87, 1987.

7. Milton Hollstein, "Media economics in Western Europe." Chap. 14 in Martin and Chaudhary, op. cit. 1983.

8. Mark Hopkins, "Media economics in the Communist world." Chap. 16 in Martin and Chaudhary, op. cit. 1983.

9. Osmo A. Wiio, "The mass media role in the Western world." Chap. 5 in Martin and Chaudhary, op. cit. 1983. See also Don R. Le Duc, "West European newspapers and the cable revolution," Journalism Quarterly 51:258-264, 1974.

about how substantial this difference is. [10] He finds the U. S., Germany and Switzerland having similar patterns of governmental support for the press, through special tax rates, postal rates and governmental advertising. The Netherlands and France have these forms of governmental intervention plus several others such as direct subsidies, favorable transportation rates and specific regulations over ownership and pricing. Belgium had somewhat more governmental intervention than the first group but less than the second, according to Picard's analysis.

The "Fourth Estate" ideology of journalism originated in Europe and historically received extensive attention in America, claiming for the press a socially corrective role of watching over centralized political powers which were increasingly distant from the populations being governed. [11] While the Fourth Estate conception is largely a myth, a myth may have certain functions. Prominence of the Fourth Estate ideal in American and European journalistic writings may reinforce a certain degree of conflict reporting and editorial expression. It may also have stimulated

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10. Robert G. Picard, "Patterns of state intervention in Western press economics," Journalism Quarterly 62"3-9, 1985.

11. See T. Carlyle, ON HEROES AND HERO WORSHIP, London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1841 and 1963 and G. Boyce, "The fourth estate: The reappraisal of a concept," in G. Boyce, J. Curran, and P. Wingate, eds., NEWSPAPER HISTORY: FROM THE 17th CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY, London: Constable, Sage, 1978.

debate over concentration of ownership in media, which has been occurring in all western nations. [12]

There is considerable debate as to whether the role of media differs across political systems. An extensive literature supports the view that the press of any nation is basically responsive to the status quo power groupings.[13,14,15,16,17,18] At the same time, a view expounded for years is that American and other Western media operate on either a libertarian or "social responsibility" theory while media in Eastern bloc nations

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12. Milton Hollstein, "Media Economics in Western Europe," pp. 241-264 in Martin and Chaudhary, op. cit.

13. Morris Janowitz, THE COMMUNITY PRESS IN AN URBAN SETTING. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1952.

14. Warren Breed, "Mass communication and sociocultural integration." Social Forces 37:109-116, 1958.

15. Alex Edelstein and J.B. Schulz, "The leadership role of the weekly newspaper as seen by community leaders: A sociological perspective." pp.221-238 in L. A. Dexter and D. M. White, eds., PEOPLE, SOCIETY AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS. New York: Free Press, 1964.

16. C. N. Olien, G. A. Donohue and P. J. Tichenor, "The community editor's power and the reporting of conflict." Journalism Quarterly 45:243-252, 1968.

17. David Paletz, Peggy Reichert and Barbara McIntyre, "How the media support local government authority. Public Opinion Quarterly 35:80-92, 1971.

18. Herbert Gans, DECIDING WHAT'S NEWS: A STUDY OF CBS EVENING NEWS, NBC NIGHTLY NEWS, NEWSWEEK AND TIME. New York: Pantheon, 1979.

operate in the service of the central political power.[19] While the contention of the "social responsibility" argument seems to be that Western media are more pluralistic and report more information deviating from central government policy, [20] the research available at the present time is inconclusive on this point. Several observers have challenged whether the Western-Eastern differences in press role are as extensive as sometimes claimed.[21] Among these observers are Galtung and Ruge [22], Gerbner and Marvanyi [23] and Schulz [24], all of whom find Western media focussing on elites as much as Eastern media if not more. Some observers note that formal newspaper ties to political parties were sustained longer in Europe than in the U. S. [25]

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19. Wilbur Schramm, RESPONSIBILITY IN MASS COMMUNICATION. New York: Harper, 1957.

20. Osmo A. Wiio, op. cit.

21. Klaus Schoenbach, "News in the Western world." Chap. 2 in Martin and Chaudhary, op. cit. 1983.

22. Johan Galtung and Mari H. Ruge, "The structure of foreign news."pp. 259-298 in J. Tunstall, ed., MEDIA SOCIOLOGY: A READER. Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1970.

23. George Gerbner and George Marvanyi, "The many worlds of the world's press." Journal of Communication 27, 1: 52-66, 1977.

24. Winfried Schulz, W. German publication cited in Schoenbach, op. cit.

25. Henry Schulte, "Mass media as vehicles of education, persuasion, and opinion making in the Western world." Chap. 8 in Martin and Chaudhary, op. cit. 1983.

although a shift away from these ties in Europe has been noted recently [26]. Such a shift may be interpreted as a response to structural change. West Germany is a special case, in that all newspapers were licensed by the occupation authorities after World War II [27].

Considerable attention is given in the comparative media literature to "press freedom," a concept of Western origin referring to the extent to which media are unconstrained by governmental censorship or other regulation [28]. While there are national variations, Western nations as a group have a history of suppression of speech but today have similar laws protecting freedom of expression and of the press.

Some observers regard the European press as having an active "opinion" tradition in contrast with more of an "information" orientation in the U. S. The difference is often linked to the multiple political party arrangements and bi-lingual cultures of Europe, which may be contrasted with the bi-party system and

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[26]. Merrill, Bryan, and Alisky, op. cit.

[27]. Norbert Frei, "Reform of the German Press System," Journalism Quarterly 64:793-798, 1987.

[28]. Hanno Hardt, "Press freedom in Western societies." Chap. 17 in Martin and Chaudhary, op. cit. 1983.

mono-lingualism of the U. S. [29] Since World War II European newspapers have been found to shift toward an "information-oriented" model with increased advertising dependence [30].

While certain differences may occur, the literature suggests considerable convergence in press roles in Europe and the U. S. Relatively open mass communication is a system need of all Western nations as a result of industrialization, division of labor and consequent pluralism. Any differences on specific measures which do appear may be accounted for by individual national factors, some of which have been subjected to extensive scrutiny.

The U. S. federal system, while having strong and early European roots, is seen as a reaction to the centralizing structures of the older nations [31]. Even though political and economic control in the U. S. is becoming increasingly centralized, many observers regard European nations as more centralized within their national boundaries than is the U.S. European nations are smaller in geography and population than the U. S. and in many respects might be compared with individual

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29. See Huntington, op. cit.; Alexis de Tocqueville, "Selections from THE OLD REGIME AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION," pp. 200-227 in Bendix, op. cit.; and Alexis de Tocqueville, DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA, edited by J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner, translated by George Lawrence. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.

30. Merrill, Bryan and Alisky, op. cit.

31. See Huntington, op. cit.

American states. The smaller the country, perhaps the greater the possibility that the nation will be the operating unit.

Finally, there is a question about the nature of corporate ownership of media and whether its consequences, if any, are comparable in the two systems. The continuing shift from independent to corporate ownership parallels businesses generally. The community newspaper has evolved from a local entrepreneurship based on a single news product to a corporate enterprise featuring greater size and economies of scale, greater complexity and an emphasis on sectionalization and targeting distribution to specific audiences under the assumption that this will maximize returns. This would be true for any business enterprise. "Chain" or "group" corporations controlled under 15 percent of all U. S. daily newspaper circulation in 1923, 60 percent in 1976 and 75 percent in 1986 [32]. Some have contended that corporate owners make circulation and content choices based upon advertising needs rather than information needs. Blankenburg has suggested that large corporations are more likely to make such "optimizing" decisions because of their scale of operations and managerial resources [33]. While such criticisms are heard with perhaps increased intensity in recent years, supporting data are few. In a recent Minnesota study, editors as a group,

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[32]. Editor & Publisher International Yearbook, 1987.

[33]. William B. Blankenburg, "Newspaper Ownership and Control of Circulation to Increase Profits." Journalism Quarterly, 59:390-398 (1982).

regardless of ownership, were highly favorable toward reporting and editorializing about new business, and editors in individually-owned entrepreneurships were more likely than editors of corporate-owned newspapers to mention profit concerns as criteria for judging their newspapers' performance. At the same time, corporate ownership was strongly associated with the extent to which these newspapers covered nonlocal business news.[34] The literature on corporate effects, taken as a whole, is not definitive.[35]

Editors Interviewed

The data are based upon an exploratory study of European and American editors. In spring of 1985, telephone interviews were conducted among editors of 59 weeklies and 19 dailies in Minnesota and 77 dailies in Wisconsin, Iowa, North Dakota and South Dakota. The weeklies were all in county seat communities and the dailies are in regional cities, outside metropolitan areas, having 60,000 or fewer inhabitants. This is a regional rather than a national sample, a methodological point that underscores the exploratory nature of the study. The states in which the surveys were conducted have substantial rural populations and long agricultural traditions, although their

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34. Olien, C. N., P. J. Tichenor and G. A. Donohue, "Relation between corporate ownership and editor attitudes about business." Journalism Quarterly 65:259-266, 1988.

35. Hale, Dennis, "Editorial Diversity and Concentration," chapter 11 in Picard, Winter, McCombs and Lacy, op. cit.

economic and occupational structure has diversified considerably in recent years.

In spring of 1988, editors were interviewed in person in 30 nonmetropolitan communities of The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland and West Germany. The sample was purposively selected, restricted to communities with 60,000 inhabitants or fewer. While an attempt was made to approximate the U. S. sample in community size, the European communities tended to have larger populations than those in the U. S. sample. A French-language version of the interview schedule was employed among all editors contacted in France, two in Belgium and one in Switzerland. All of the other interviews were conducted in English, although in several cases another staff member or a community citizen served as interpreter. The European sample included editors of 22 dailies and eight weeklies. Since community papers are assumed to be dailies in more pluralistic communities and weeklies are more likely to be published in smaller and less pluralistic communities, the data are presented according to frequency of publication for both the U. S. and European samples.

The interview schedule items for analysis were identical in the various samples, within the limits of translation. The items included measures of perceptions of the functions of the newspaper in the community, gatekeeper role in reporting a variety of community topics, perceptions of the community planning process, and editor views on economic conditions, taxation and agricultural policy.

Findings: Community Role of the Newspaper

Since the number of European editors interviewed is small and the U. S. newspapers are entirely Midwestern, the comparative findings must be considered exploratory. Nevertheless, the primacy of the news and information role in both the U.S. and European newspapers is apparent in the responses to the question, "What, in your opinion, are some of the main things your newspaper does for this community?" More than three-fourths of the editors in both nations gave responses classified as "news and information" (Table 1). Other responses, such as conflict arousal and opinion leadership, were mentioned less frequently by all editors.

It should be emphasized again that this is an exploratory study with small numbers of cases. Nevertheless, readers may be interested in significance levels that do appear in the tables. The European editors were more likely than U. S. editors to express "community identity" as one of the "main things" their newspapers do. Nearly a third of the European daily editors (32 percent) gave responses in that category, compared with only 8 percent of the editors of U. S. dailies. When weeklies and dailies are combined, one finds that 40 percent of the 30 European editors gave a community identity response, compared with 10 percent of the 152 U. S. editors.

Table 1. "Main Things the Newspaper Does for the Community" among editors in the U. S. and Western Europe

	Weeklies		Dailies		
	U. S.	Europe	U. S.	Europe	
Percent mentioning:@	(59)	(8)	(93)	(22)	
News and Information	85%	75%	77%	82%	
Interest, Conflict Arousal	19%	37%	24%	23%	
Education, Opinion Leadership	12%	12	22%	32%	
Business, Civic Promotion	22%	0	21%	14%	
Public Service	3%	0	15%	4%	
Watchdog	13%	0	12%	14%	
Community Identity	12%	62%	8%	32%	*
Advertising	3%	0	4%	9%	

@ Percentages do not add to 100% because of multiple responses.
* = Difference between U.S. & European dailies, $p < .02$, chi-square test, df = 1.

This more frequent reference to community identity among Europeans may arise from even greater specialization among community media there than in the U. S. That is, communities in the U. S. typically have single community newspapers. If the paper is a weekly, the community may also be served by a daily from a larger regional city and, although less frequently today than in decades past, a metropolitan daily. This means that a typical news vendor station in a Midwest community will display three or four local, regional or national daily papers. In the more dense community structure of Europe, there appears to be more competition among newspapers at all levels. It is not

unusual in a rural European community to find eight or 10 daily newspapers on a newsstand.

Given this wide array of media, the European community newspaper seems particularly likely to find its niche in local news which competing media, local or from elsewhere, cannot duplicate. Furthermore, the European community newspapers appear to be organized to maintain this niche. They have an average of 50.6 community correspondents "not on the regular newspaper staff," compared with only 8.1 for the U. S. newspapers. A French editor said every village in the circulation area had at least one correspondent, providing information on everything "from Agriculture to Rock and Roll..and what to do with money (investments)." A Swiss editor said he tried to report "things which national radio and TV can't bring to the whole country," and an editor of a Belgian weekly stressed that the paper "is close to the people" in the rural community, bringing a "a positive and optimistic image of life here." Many of the "identity" responses contained emphasis on weddings, hunting and fishing, athletics, and other "miscellaneous" news items.

Such responses also occurred among Minnesota and other Midwestern editors but far less frequently than in Europe. It should be added that 1965 data from the Minnesota segment of the sample indicate that the number of community correspondents for newspapers in that state has been reduced by more than half during the past 20 years. While earlier data are not available for the European editors, it appears they are maintaining the

nonprofessional correspondent system at a substantially greater level than the Americans.

Although the interview schedule did not ask for specification of who the community correspondents are, European editors often mentioned teachers, sports club leaders, government agency representatives and spokespersons for other groups in the region. These are purposive communicators, reporting on behalf of interest and activity groups, and their greater number for European newspapers raises a question of whether they may have more direct input into newspaper content than may occur in the U. S. newspapers. That question is difficult to answer, since editors on both continents gave similar estimates of the proportion of news-editorial content written by the regular staff--averaging about 57 percent in each case.

Ownership appears not to be a factor in either the American or European editors' mention of community identity as one of the "main things the newspaper does." In fact, European editors of local editions of corporate papers often seemed to go out of their way to emphasize this aspect of their newspaper's contribution to the locality. Those comments seemed to persist regardless of staff size, although lack of personnel was often mentioned as a reason why serving the community was so difficult.

Perceptions of watchdog role

The findings point to some differences in perceptions of the watchdog function and exchanging information among local groups. On the one hand, majorities in both Minnesota and European

samples agreed with the statement that "The most important task of a newspaper is to be a watchdog over corruption in public life," an item that presumably taps a fourth estate role.

On the other hand, there was a difference in strength of agreement with this "watchdog" item, in that nearly two-thirds of the editors of European dailies strongly agreed, compared with fewer about a fourth (26 percent) of the U. S. dailies (Table 2). The difference is significant at the .001 level.

in transmitting citizen group views to the public and (b) the role in informing citizen groups about local government.

The pattern of responses to these items might seem to reinforce the view that European newspapers concentrate relatively more on a watchdog role and somewhat less on an information role so far as governmental organizations and interest groups are concerned. A question might be asked whether

Table 2. Agreement with statements about role of press among community editors in the U. S. and Western Europe.

	Weeklies		Dailies		
Percent strongly agreeing that:	U.S. (59)	Eur. (8)	U.S. (93)	Eur. (22)	
The most important task of a newspaper is to be a watchdog over corruption in public life.	15%	25%	26%	64%	***
The local newspaper is one of the best outlets for getting views of citizen groups to the public.	66%	86%	74%	50%	*
Local newspapers help citizen groups learn what local government is doing.	75%	71%	86%	64%	*

*** = $p < .001$ * = $p < .05$, chi-square test, df = 1. Significant differences are between U. S. and European daily editors only.

performance is in line with this response. The data, in fact, suggest strong similarities between editors from the two continents in their judgments of appropriateness of reporting about specific topics (table 3). There are no significant differences on any of the topics presented.

To illustrate, two-thirds of more of all subgroups of editors regard "potential business" as "very appropriate" for news stories, while less than half make such a judgment for "farm product promotion." A further indicator of similarity is the rank difference correlation (rho = .85, $p < .05$) between ratings of the nine topics by U.S. and European daily editors.

Table 3. Appropriateness of reporting about specific topics among community editors in the U. S. and Western Europe.

Percent rating topic as "very appropriate" for news reports@	Weeklies U.S. (59)	Weeklies Eur. (8)	Dailies U.S. (93)	Dailies Eur. (22)
Juvenile Delinquency	51%	43%	60%	55%
School Controversy	85%	43%	90%	73%
Potential Business	78%	86%	73%	68%
Local Government Reorg.	81%	43%	83%	77%
Farm Product Promotion	22%	43%	32%	36%
Farming Practices	52%	57%	53%	32%
Community Planning	78%	71%	68%	52%
Local income distributions	32%	59%	36%	36%
Local Unemployment	68%	86%	75%	82%

@ Percentages are based on actual number of responses, although nonresponses were no more than 2 for any subgroup.

The principle differences across continents were between judgments of "very appropriate" and "appropriate." For only two topics did more than a third of either European or U. S. editors judge a topic to be fairly or very inappropriate for reporting. One was farm product promotion, judged inappropriate by 40 percent of the European and by 28 percent of the U. S. editors. "Farming practices" were seen as inappropriate by a third of the European editors and by about a tenth of those in the U. S.

Editorializing

All editors were asked to judge the appropriateness of "editorializing" about the same topics. In these responses, two significant differences emerged. Eighty-five percent of the editors of U. S. dailies judged school controversy "very appropriate" for editorials, compared with half of the European editors (Table 4). Also, about two thirds of the U. S. daily editors found it "very appropriate" to editorialize about community planning, compared with 41 percent of the Europeans. Both differences are significant statistically ($p < .001$ for the first, $p < .05$ for the second).

Editors in both systems were more likely to judge certain topics as fairly or very inappropriate for editorializing. European and U. S. editors alike gave such judgments in nearly half the cases for farm product promotion. For farming practices, judgments of "inappropriate" were made by half the

Table 4. Appropriateness of editorializing about specific topics among community editors in the U. S. and Western Europe.

Percent rating topic as "very appropriate" for editorials@	Weeklies U.S. (59)	Weeklies Eur. (8)	Dailies U.S. (93)	Dailies Eur (22)	
Juvenile Delinquency	48%	33%	63%	35%	
School Controversy	79%	50%	85%	50%	***
Potential Business	80%	86%	53%	35%	
Local Government Reorg.	65%	51%	78%	70%	
Farm Product Promotion	16%	50%	24%	15%	
Farming Practices	32%	50%	28%	25%	
Community Planning	65%	50%	66%	41%	*
Local income distributions	31%	33%	27%	30%	
Local Unemployment	52%	67%	52%	58%	

@ Percentages are based on actual number of responses, although nonresponses were no more than 2 for any subgroup.

* = $p < .05$ *** = $p < .001$, chi-square test, df = 1. Significant differences are between U. S. and European daily editors only.

Europeans and by slightly less than a third of the U. S. editors. Even though agricultural was widely seen on both continents as a problem area, the editors see it as far less appropriate for editorial promotion than, say, potential business. Here, the limitations of the U. S. Midwestern sample should again be acknowledged. The importance of agriculture might well vary by region of the nation.

Two possible explanations might be suggested for the low interest in editorializing about agricultural topics. One is that editorializing about economic matters may be reserved for

the potential growth areas in non-agricultural business, with agriculture to a certain degree being written off as a declining activity. Another is that the difficulties in agriculture may be regarded as stemming from national policy and international relations, with local editorial promotion viewed as not getting at the crux of the problem.

For seven of the nine topics in Table 4, European daily editors gave a lower proportion of "very appropriate" responses than their U. S. counterparts. A caveat might be mentioned here, that the degree to which respondents select extreme positions on a 5-point scale may vary somewhat by culture. It should also be pointed out that European editors were less likely to editorialize on anything. About 27 percent of them said they had not written editorials in any of the four most recent editions, compared with 13 percent of the U. S. editors. This difference is significant ($p < .05$), and it runs counter to the view of European editors as more "opinion oriented" than Americans, at least in the community or "regional" newspapers. It holds open the possibility that, as Merrill, Bryan and Alisky suggest, the European press may have shifted to an "information orientation" and away from opinion writing.[36]

Editorializing About Community Planning

The "community planning" concept does not seem to have as much relevance among community editors in Europe as it has in the

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36. Merrill, John, Carter R. Bryan and Marvin Alisky, The Foreign Press: A survey of the world's journalism. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970.

U.S. While majorities of both editor samples rated reporting about planning as "very appropriate," the European editors, as indicated, were less inclined to editorialize about it. To illustrate, only 3 of 20 editors in The Netherlands, Belgium and France stated that editorializing about community planning was "very appropriate." This compares with seven among 10 editors in Germany and Switzerland.

These differences underscore a recognition in the first three nations that community futures are decided primarily in their national and regional capitals. Some Dutch editors pointed out that national government classifies communities according to whether they shall be allowed to grow or not. A French editor noted that community planning "is not common in France, we are very centralized here" and made a specific comparison with the Swiss cantonal government system which he perceived as providing more local control.[37] A Belgian editor said that community planning is something that "doesn't exist here," even though he regarded a series of national and international political and economic decisions as having led to pronounced growth of his city in recent years. Swiss and West German editors, on the other hand, in several cases stressed the "local" and "democratic" aspects of community planning.

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37. Charlotte Muret, "The Swiss pattern for a federated Europe," pp. 149-173 in INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL COMMUNITIES: An Anthology, New York, Doubleday, 1966. Reprinted from Ed M. Earle, ed., NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM, New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1950.

Further analysis suggests that the differences in Europe are not so much in what community planning means, but whether it has any meaning at all at the local level. Among the 30 editors in Europe, only 21 (70 percent) could provide a response to the question "As you understand it, what is meant by the term 'community planning?'" More than 99 percent of U. S. editors provided definitions. Responses that were made do not differ appreciably across continents.

Corporate ownership is not a major factor in this analysis. Whether a newspaper is owned by a corporation or is independently owned has little effect on any of these editor perceptions, in either the U. S. or in the European setting (Table 5).

Table 5. Appropriateness of editorializing about specific topics according to ownership in the U. S. and Western Europe.

	Independent		Corporate	
Percent rated item very appropriate--editorials:	U.S. (28)	Europe (15)	U.S. (47)	Europe (12)
Juvenile Delinquency	48.3	26.7	54.2	45.5
School Controversy	78.6	53.3	81.3	45.5
Potential Business	75.0	53.3	76.6	41.7
Govt. Reorganization	57.1	73.3	70.8	58.3
Farm Product Promotion	25.0	21.4	15.2	27.3
Farming Practices	32.1	26.7	32.6	36.4
Community Planning	60.7	42.9	64.6	44.4
Income Distributions	29.6	33.3	29.8	30.0
Local Unemployment	40.7	57.1	66.7	63.6

One world of community journalism, or more?

This exploratory analysis is generally consistent with the view that the role of the community press is highly similar in different nations of the Western world. On both continents, the editors share the same relative priorities on news and information, and upon reporting the issues in government, education, and business. The differences that do appear are primarily seen in less inclination among European editors to rate certain issues such as school controversies and community planning as highly appropriate for their editorial columns.

Such national differences as political decision-making processes may account for varying gatekeeper perspectives on such conflict-management procedures as community planning. The data, while limited, suggest that these structural differences may be as important within the European system as they are between Europe and the U. S. It may be less of a question of what community planning means than whether the concept is applicable at the local level in certain political systems.

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